

Matter of Fact By Joseph Alsop

Through Thick to Thin

VERY FEW PEOPLE have grasped, as yet, how much the shape of the future is going to depend on the talks about anti-missile - missiles that Ambassador J. Llewellyn Thompson is now carrying on in Moscow. Thus far the Soviet response to Thompson has been cool but noncommittal.



Alsop

Ambassador Thompson has been telling the Soviet leaders, "We won't deploy if you won't deploy. Let's both save ourselves a great many billions of dollars." But the Soviets, as is well known, have already begun deploying their anti-missile-missiles on a considerable scale.

Persuading them to reverse their course is clearly going to be very difficult indeed, and not only because a flat self-reversal is being asked for. The truth is that the Soviet military leaders have far more muscle in Soviet society than our Joint Chiefs of Staff have ever had in our society, even pre-McNamara.

When the silence of terror ended with the death of Stalin, all groups in Russia were free to throw their weight about. The military thereupon played the leading role in the rise of Khrushchev. The wily Khrushchev at length organized a night of the long knives, to get rid of his over-mighty chief sponsor, Marshal Zhukov. But even thereafter, Khrushchev was never really successful in any of his series of attempts to cut back Soviet defense expenditures. And it is virtually certain that the military also played an important role in the night of the long knives that got rid of Khrushchev.

HENCE ANY COURSE that really outrages the marshals of the Soviet Defense Ministerium is pretty unlikely to be adopted by the Soviet government. And if you figure out what Gen. Curtis E. LeMay would be saying if he were in the Marshal's shoes, you have an almost certainly accurate version of what the Soviet marshals are now saying about Thompson's proposals.

It will be a near-miracle, therefore, if the Soviets reverse their course completely. If they do not do so, the United States will then have

to choose between what the Pentagon calls the "thick" and the "thin" deployments of American anti-missile-missiles (which are more advanced than the Soviet models).

The "thin" deployment will give us an anti-missile defense against anyone *but* the Soviets, conspicuously including China, and it will afford protection to our own missile striking power, even against the Soviets. Its cost will be between \$5 billion and \$9 billion, depending on the degree of thinness.

The "thick" deployment will cover all populated centers and will cost between \$30 billion and \$50 billion. It is calculated to save 70 million U.S. lives in the event of an all-out Soviet attack—provided the Soviets do nothing to overcome it. This looks superficially tempting.

YET SECRETARY of Defense Robert McNamara has already plumped for the "thin" deployment. He points out that it is much cheaper to increase offensive power, which he intends to do, than to build defensive power. He further says that if we deploy a "thick" defense, the Soviets will inevitably overcome it by much increasing their numbers of offensive missiles, whereupon we shall be minus many wasted billions, but otherwise back at position one.

McNamara's opponents say, correctly, that the most dangerous thing to do in an arms race is to fall far behind—and they add that we can easily beat the Soviets in an investments race. The trouble is that being forced into this kind of an arms and investments race will almost certainly militarize Soviet society in the end. And that, certainly, is not a pretty prospect, or a result likely to serve American interests.

Thus one wonders whether Ambassador Thompson would not be better employed preaching the mutual advantages, to the Soviets and ourselves, of "thin" deployments by both countries. The point about "thin" Soviet and American deployments of anti-missile-missiles is that they will give the two giant powers complete protection, not against one another, to be sure, but against any kind of nuclear power that can be imaginably developed in other countries like France and China.

Unless he chooses to

threaten his new friends in Germany, Gen. de Gaulle's *force de frappe* will thus be automatically reduced to an immensely costly gesture of empty pomp, like Louis XIV's gold-woven bed curtains. Chinese nuclear power will cease to be a threat either to the United States or the U.S.S.R. The British will actually be likely to junk their burdensome nuclear deterrent, as being both expensive and useless.

Although it will certainly displease Gen. de Gaulle in an extreme degree, there is nothing in this prospect that ought to displease practical-minded Americans and Russians. In fact if the United States and U.S.S.R. can just content themselves with "thin" anti-missile deployments, a great deal will thereby be gained.

© 1967. The Washington Post Co.